

****ATTENTION****

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FACTS:

Pheasant and Farmland Wildlife Habitat Recovery Plan



Pheasant Trends

Pheasant hunting has long been a rural tradition in Washington. At the peak of Washington's pheasant boom in the 1960s and 1970s, between 90,000 and 125,000 hunters took to the fields every year. Last year, about 50,000 residents hunted pheasant in farmland areas of eastern Washington.

Pheasant populations in Washington once exceeded 1 million birds. The 1963 harvest in Grant County was 134,000 birds. Last year, only 23,000 pheasant were harvested in Grant County.

The decline of pheasants and pheasant hunting is caused by habitat loss. Mechanization of agriculture and expansion of the agricultural land base has led to conversion of remaining idle agricultural lands. This land, usually small wetland areas, vegetation along irrigation ditches and roadways, as well as field borders provided excellent permanent habitat for pheasants and other farmland wildlife.

Pheasant and Farmland Wildlife Habitat

The pheasant, native to Asia, was introduced in Washington in 1883. The first pheasant season was opened in 1897.

As chicks, pheasants eat insects. As they grow older, they switch to weed seeds, grasses and grain. Traditionally, food sources have been croplands.

Pheasants generally spend their whole life in an area about one-square-mile in size. This is called their "annual range." Annual range is actually a complex of habitats including nesting habitat, brooding habitat, feeding habitat, dusting habitat and permanent cover.

The most important factor determining the strength of pheasant populations is the availability of permanent cover. Because it forms the nucleus of the habitat complex, holding them where other needs can be met, it is called "retention cover." The best retention cover is cattails and willows, sagebrush, rose thickets, woody brush and windbreaks.

High quality retention cover is characterized by small patches of permanent habitat scattered throughout farmland areas. An average of 20 acres of permanent retention cover in plots between one and 10 acres in size will sustain a healthy pheasant population on 640 acres of agricultural land. Scattering these plots gives the best results.

In addition to pheasants, a host of other farmland wildlife, including burrowing owls, songbirds, deer and other wildlife benefit from this type of habitat.

The Pheasant and Farmland Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Plan

The Washington Department of Wildlife has developed a pheasant and farmland wildlife recovery plan that would restore robust pheasant populations and enhance other wildlife. The plan focuses on acquisition, restoration and maintenance

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Pheasant and Farmland Wildlife Habitat Recovery Plan

of many strategically placed habitat parcels, located primarily in the irrigated agricultural areas of eastern Washington.

Under the plan, the development of permanent cover would be complimented by other cooperative and volunteer management programs which aim at preservation of other key habitat components which benefit pheasants and other wildlife species.

Costs

Because the program is based in the principle that acquisition is the most cost-effective method of habitat enhancement in the long-term, major costs of the program are associated with land acquisition. These are one-time costs. Additional costs associated with landowner compensation payments will compliment the acquisition program.

Total acquisition cost per acre for acquisition	\$2,988
Total acquisition cost for 800 acres per year	\$2,390,400
Total landowner compensation cost per year	\$26,000
Total program cost over 10 years (includes inflation)	\$25,496,230

Results

It will take 1-3 years after development before a noticeable response from farmland wildlife will be evident. In the long term, the program will create habitat capable of sustaining larger pheasant and other wildlife populations. The plan will increase wildlife-related recreational opportunities in eastern Washington, and reinforce economic activity in wildlife-related businesses and other services in rural communities and urban population centers.